

## CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS



### *A Message from Chuck*

*Greetings folks!* I wish all of you the best as we enter the holiday season. I trust that all of you enjoyed Thanksgiving with your families. We truly have much to be thankful for.

I'm particularly thankful for all of you; for your professionalism and for your dedication to the task of getting conservation on the land. You did a remarkable job of delivering technical assistance to our customers during this year and enabled us to meet our Farm Bill commitments under a staggering workload. Many of you worked directly with farmers and ranchers to develop EQIP contracts or to design conservation practices. Others provided vital technical and administrative support without which these accomplishments would not have been possible.

I thank you for your efforts to meet these commitments while not forgetting our Resource Conservation District and agency partner goals. These are critically important to our locally led approach to conservation.

As we finish out 2002 and begin the new year, I would ask all of you to continue looking and planning ahead. This is the time

of the year when we can make contact and follow-up with our customers and partners. We can encourage agricultural producers to come in and update conservation plans in anticipation of new Farm Bill activities.

We can make every effort to insure that local people who might benefit from our programs are aware of them. I hope that every Field Office will have at least one local meeting to discuss the Farm Bill programs within the next couple of months. These would be in addition to the 12 or so regional meetings hosted by CARCD and state office staff. I encourage you to pay special attention to those who historically have not participated in our programs. Many are simply not aware of the exceptional assistance we can provide!

Again, I want to thank all of you for the fine work you have done. You are true professionals and I am very proud to be working with you. There is not an agency like NRCS! Never has been; never will be!

My best to all of you!

Chuck Bell  
State Conservationist

### Frank La Pena's 'Gift' honors American Indian heritage

By Reina Rogers  
American Indian Liaison/Greenville

**D**uring American Indian Heritage Month, we celebrate the rich cultural traditions and proud ancestry of American Indians and Alaska Natives, and we recognize the vital contributions these groups have made to the strength and diversity of our society." This is the opening paragraph of President George W. Bush's proclamation calling upon all Americans to commemorate November as National American Indian Heritage Month, 2002.

Using an original painting created by California native artist Frank La Pena, the NRCS American Indian Heritage Month 2002 poster was published for national distribution.

"This was an unusual opportunity for me, to create a piece highlighting the diverse Indian people of the state. The hardest part was deciding what to include and what to leave out," says artist La Pena. "Natives of the land, now called California, continue to have unique cultural traditions. I didn't want to slight anyone, but I couldn't show it all."

Frank La Pena gave a presentation about the artwork at the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual California Indian Conference at Palomar College in San Marcos, for the Noli Indian School in San Jacinto, and at DQ University in Davis. La Pena is also planning a show at the Turtle Bay Museum in Redding opening January 31, 2003, where "The World is a Gift" will be displayed in addition to his other works.





### ***The father of conservation!***

Keynote speaker President Theodore Roosevelt (actor Keith McGough, above) inspired the CARCD crowd to "strive for mighty deeds." As a pioneer of change, Roosevelt set aside 230 million acres, doubled the number of national forests, established 16 monuments and created 52 bird sanctuaries. Coincidentally, "Teddy's" appearance coincided with the 100th anniversary of his stuffed toy namesake, the Teddy Bear. (Photo: Paul Laustsen)

## **CARCD panel discussion gives conference goers varied views of what might be**

*By Dave Sanden*

*Public Affairs Specialist/Red Bluff*

**M**uch like Dickens's Christmas spirits showed Scrooge where he had been and where he was likely headed in the near future, panel speakers at the November 13-17th California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) opening session gave the audience an environmental perspective through eyes of the ghosts of environment policy.

Nadine Bailey spoke of ESA and past policies that protected species such as the spotted owl at the cost of a decimated timber industry, burned up watersheds, dying towns, and displaced families. She pointed out that people are part of the environment and must be part of the solution. "Let's not let this be the future of rural America," said Bailey.

Next Marty Massey, President of the Tullake Grower's Association, reviewed the recent situation in the Klamath Basin, where because of two biological opinions, farmers got no water for the first time in 95 years. "You have two choices," said Massey. "Do something, or do nothing." He noted that rural America is facing serious problems. "We are on the verge of losing our rural way of life. And when it's gone, it's gone forever."

Sue Sutton, the "ghost" of environmental policy future, foresaw loss of the family farm, loss of property rights, dried up land, impoverished counties, and dust bowls. But like Scrooge, we may still have time to save Tiny Tim (landowners) if the current course is changed. Dan Straight from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Jovita Pajarillo from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency offered a slightly different perspective and emphasized they would like to be part of the debate.

A hopeful message to emerge from the discussion was that the scary scenarios are merely what may be, not necessarily what must be.

## **State soil survey GIS pilot program**

*By David Howell*

*State Soil Survey GIS Specialist/Arcata*

**T**hree soil survey offices have been selected to pilot the implementation of GIS in California. The purpose of this trial is to evaluate the implementation of GIS software, hardware, and training for soil survey operations. The

three pilot sites are: Victorville (Carrie-Ann Houdeshell, Project Leader); South Lake Tahoe (Woody Loftis, Project Leader), and Arcata (Joe Seney, Project Leader).

During this pilot phase of about one year, computers and software will be installed, and two training sessions will be provided. Custom and standard data will also be provided. Support will be provided by David Howell and Russell Almaraz.

Some of the main initial uses of GIS in soil survey offices will be: Digitizing and editing soil survey polygons; producing public information maps; displaying and evaluating soil-forming factor data; producing professional draft soil maps, and testing soil mapping against other ecosystem data.

We will attempt to learn from this pilot effort so that as we implement GIS in all California soil survey offices our results will be improved. We are currently planning the purchase of equipment for the remaining offices. These purchases will proceed as budgets permit.

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## **CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS STAFF**

*Editor: Jim Cairns*

*Layout/Design: Jim Cairns; Special thanks to Paul Laustsen*

*Contributors: Paul Laustsen, Dave Sanden, Brian Ziegler, Jolene Lau, Jim Salomone, Susan Southard, Bill Ward, Reina Rogers, David Howell, Michael Stinebrink, and Jim Cairns*

Some photos have been digitally altered.

**Send questions, comments, and contributions to:**

*Current Developments*

*NRCS Public Affairs*

*430 G Street, #4164, Davis, California 95616*

*E-mail: [jim.cairns@ca.usda.gov](mailto:jim.cairns@ca.usda.gov); Phone: (530) 792-5693*

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## Mario J. Milani, Civil Engineer

By Jim Cairns  
Public Affairs Specialist/Davis  
With Bill Ward  
State Design Engineer/Davis

On that first day in 1956, Elvis was rockin', "Ike" lived in the White House, and no one had yet heard of Sputnik, Reagan the politician, or the acronym NRCS. But that was 46 years ago, a world and lifetime away, and through it all Mario Milani's engineering talents sustained a career devoted to public service. Now though, starting in January, Mario wants to shake things up, become something new that can best be expressed in one elegant, but hard to pinpoint phrase: A MAN OF LEISURE.

Mario's engineering talents are vast and well-practiced, but his first love has always been work in construction and contracting. Since September 1995, he has been Construction Engineer, with the Design Regional Technical Team, in Davis.

As a well-known expert in California and several other states, Mario specialized in reviewing contracts, specifications and drawings, and providing construction assistance to project staff. His invaluable efforts have been instrumental in California's successful implementation of multi-million dollar watershed projects that have reduced flooding, erosion, and other resource problems. Mario's knowledge in construction and contracting has enabled NRCS to provide swift and effective response to repair flood and fire damage, reducing threats left in the wake of natural disasters.

Mario's distinguished career



began as a field office Engineer with the Soil Conservation Service, July 2, 1956, and has progressed to the present at NRCS. His retirement years spent with family and friends will no doubt reflect on tales of the many hats he has worn through the years: Field Office Engineer; Area Engineer; Project Engineer; Planning Engineer; Construction Engineer, and RC&D Coordinator. In fact, during one 10-year stint in Stockton beginning in 1966, Mario held multiple positions concurrently, as Combination Field Office/Project Engineer and Area Engineer.

This scenario and others may have some colleagues speculating that he holds the current unofficial state record for the largest number of varied NRCS engineering-related positions. But Mario Milani is not saying. Just as with his long-lived career, he would rather let the facts speak for themselves.

By Brian Ziegler  
Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

**L**emon grass, Jicama (pronounced *HICK-a-ma*, a type of water chestnut), and sticky corn are among several new crops being produced by southeast Asian farmers in central California, but little technical information exists

## Excellence in range management: Celebrating a century farm

By Jim Salomone  
NRCS Earth Team Volunteer

One hundred years ago Angelo Poncia started the Poncia Dairy in a small enclave called Fallon, a short drive from Tomales Bay in Marin County. At that time, farming was very diversified and so the Dairy consisted of potato, chicken, pig and hay operations.

Today, Angelo's grandson, Al Poncia, 60, runs the show, but as Al will attest, things have definitely changed over the years. Recently Al was awarded the prestigious Excellence in Range Management Award for his stewardship of rangeland, contributions toward rangeland advancements and creative improvements to managing rangeland challenges. The award was presented by the Society for Range Management, which is a professional scientific society and conservation organization whose 4,000 members reside in 48 countries, including many developing nations.



Rancher Al Poncia, recipient of the prestigious Excellence in Range Management Award.

The ranch today consists of 700 acres that provide rangeland for a 200 head commercial Angus cattle operation and a small flock of sheep. The Poncia Dairy is now leased to a neighboring dairyman, but Al is still active in keeping the facility up-to-date on all the current management improvements regarding runoff and manure disposal. He finds himself juggling farm operations with business decisions, urban sprawl and the preservation of natural resources that surround the area. Al takes all of this in stride, and today is very satisfied and proud of his family and all of their accomplishments.

## Tastes good... but how do you grow it?



Workshop in Fresno gives answers on how to grow specialty crops.

Soil Conservationist Sam Vang (right) shares research with southeast Asian farmers at a specialty crop workshop in Fresno.

on how best to grow these crops. To help farmers get the maximum yield from their land, NRCS conducted a workshop November 25 at the Center for Irrigation Technology on the campus of California State

University, Fresno. Fresno Soil Conservationist Sam Vang and Visalia Soil Conservationist Chu Yang provided growers with the latest research on pest, irrigation, and nutrient management. Another workshop is scheduled for May 2003.



## Williams/Curve Fire EWP

EWP volunteers in action. In the wake of natural disasters, the question is never if soil will slide, but when.

By Paul Laustsen  
Public Affairs Specialist/Riverside

**T**he question, following the Curve and Williams Fires in the Angeles Forest, was not if soil would slide, but when. NRCS employees banded together with local, state, and other federal representatives to address this and other problems left behind by the wildfire that burned more than 37,000 acres and left steep hillsides bare.

Area IV Engineer Robert Miller knows that storm events will cause slides. "The good news is that not as many homes are in jeopardy as we first thought, thanks to flood control structures and debris basins already in place."

Of the 37,000 acres burned, 6,000 have been designated as "high severity areas" where burned hillsides are expected to generate erosion that will affect the rest of the watershed.

NRCS is assisting the cities of Glendora, San Dimas, and La Verne with EWP funds. Involved in the EWP effort are Robert Miller, Area IV Engineer; Jim Middleton,



Inspector/Civil Engineer Tech; Samara Iodice, government representative/Civil Engineer; Rich Campbell, District Conservationist; Paul Nguyen, Soil Conservationist; Carolyn LoFreso, Soil Conservationist, and Sai Syhaphom, Civil Engineer.

Representatives from Senator Diane Feinstein, Congressman David Dreier, NRCS, U.S. Forest Service, LA County Department of Public Works, Mt. Baldy Village Fire Department, and the cities of Glendora, La Verne, Azusa, San Dimas, and Claremont have formed a coalition to rehabilitate the area. The group meets regularly to keep up-to-date on the progress of all activities and coordinated efforts. The endeavor is also tracked on a Web site hosted by the LA County: <http://lacounty.info>.

## Upper Truckee to morph naturally

By Brian Ziegler  
Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

**Y**ears ago, a stretch of the Upper Truckee River near South Lake Tahoe was diverted to protect a nearby airport from flooding. The river was

rerouted into a straight line onto meadowland that had been used for grazing. "It's not natural morphology for the river," says Kim Melody, a watershed coordinator with the Tahoe Resource Conservation District. "The meadowland is eroding and the water table has been lowered," she says, adding that nearby homeowners have

## Streams and creeks need wiggle room

By Michael Stinebrink  
Soil Conservationist/Lakeport

**R**esidents of Clearlake Oaks recently witnessed an invasion of heavy equipment, laborers and lines of trucks hauling loads of large rock to the job site in Schindler Creek. The flurry of activity was part of an effort to restore a portion of Schindler Creek to a more natural pattern of flow.

The restoration effort is designed to reintroduce turns and bends to the stretch of Schindler Creek between the Highway 20 bridge and the Konocti View Drive Bridge. This will be accomplished by installing rock barbs on one side of the channel, opposed by rock riprap on the other side, at regular intervals. NRCS provided much of the planning and design assistance for the project, and Snows Lake Vineyard made a significant contribution by donating over 600 cubic yards of rock.

Prior to this work, the creek shot through a box culvert under Highway 20, before flowing in a straight channel,

become concerned.

Workshops to prepare an environmental assessment to return the river to a more natural flow were facilitated by South Lake Tahoe District Conservationist Paul Sweeney. The assessment includes grazing and wetland management plans created by NRCS staff. The public will

down to Clear Lake. This "full speed ahead" type of flow creates a torrent of water with more erosive energy than the natural channel would have been equipped to handle. Without the turns and bends that a natural stream system develops, this portion of Schindler Creek is highly volatile, or what hydrologists call "flashy."

Streams and creeks need wiggle room, and without it stream flow gouges out the streambed, picking up sediments and transporting them downstream. In Schindler Creek, as in much of Lake County, "downstream" means Clear Lake. High-energy flows deposit large amounts of sediment in the lake, bringing an influx of algae-sustaining nutrients, disease causing pathogens, and other pollutants.

The Schindler Creek Restoration Project is funded by a \$149,000 grant from the Department of Water Resources—Urban Streams Restoration Program, secured by the Schindler Creek/High Valley Coordinated Resource Management and Planning group on behalf of the East Lake Resource Conservation District. The construction work in the creek was completed this fall, with revegetation and maintenance continuing for several years.



review a draft on December 9, after which work to restore the river will commence.



# Caligrams... Statewide News in Brief



State Conservationist Chuck Bell and ASTC Helen Flach conducting one of many Farm Bill meetings statewide to get the word out.

## Chico soil survey update

By Susan Southard  
Soil Scientist/Davis

The year 2002 saw the completion of field mapping for the soil survey team in Chico, California. The Chico team, consisting of Dean

Burkett, project leader, soil scientists Andrew Conlin and Felix Panlasigui, and Susan Southard, review team leader in Davis, completed field work and soil data collection on 919,000 acres in Butte and Plumas Counties.

Butte and Plumas Counties have offered many challenges to the survey crew. Despite wide rainfall ranges — from 17 inches of precipitation in the valley to 100 inches in the mountains — and incredible geologic and geomorphic variation, the survey crew has pieced together the patterns of soils on the landscape. They have mapped soils on granitic plutons, andesitic and basaltic lahars, volcanic mudflows and ash deposits, and highly faulted and metamorphosed landscapes in remote and difficult terrain. Eight of the

12 soils orders identified in the NRCS Soil Taxonomy have been identified and mapped by the Chico Soil Survey.

The team is currently determining the ranges of soil properties for all soils identified on the mapping legend. This information will become the foundation of the Chico soil database over the next year. The soils database eventually becomes Section 2 of the FOTG and the published soil survey report used by NRCS, cooperators and soil survey users throughout the state.

## Kern office hosts Chinese delegation

By Brian Ziegler  
Public Affairs Specialist/Fresno

Air quality was a topic of great

interest to a group of Chinese government specialists who paid a recent visit to the USDA Service Center in Kern County.

The delegation met with District Conservationist Mark Davis and Soil Conservationist Raul Ramirez, who explained that farmers and ranchers, through USDA programs, can comply with state or federal regulations that were developed to address air quality issues. The delegation, sent by the United Nations, was also surprised to learn how much technical and financial assistance the U.S. government provides landowners in protecting natural resources. Some 80 percent of China's population is involved with agricultural production.

## Personnel Actions

Name	Position	Action	Grade	Location	Date
Bailey, T.	Prog Spclst	Reassignment	GS-9	Davis-STC	09/22/02
Cairns, J.	Pub Aff Spclst	New Hire	GS-7	Davis-PAS	09/22/02
Gatlin, S.	Pub Aff Spclst	Career Promo	GS-9	Davis-PAS	09/22/02
Dubay, R.	Soil Consvst	New Hire	GS-9	Willows(Cluster)	10/06/02
Faler, J.	Civil Engr	New Hire	GS-11	Elk Grove (Wtlns)	10/20/02
Ziegler, B.	Pub Aff Spclst	New Hire	GS-11	Fresno-AO	10/20/02
Lozoyo, C.	Soil Cons Tech	New Hire	GS-4	Blythe	10/22/02
Hayden, S.	Biologist	New Hire	GS-9	Escondido	11/03/02
Robles, T.	HR Asst	Career Promo	GS-7	Davis-HRO	11/03/02
Siliznoff, J.	Soil Consvst (AQ)	New Hire	GS-9	Fresno AO	11/03/02
Benedict, P.	ASTC-FO	Transfer to ND	GS-13	Riverside AO	11/17/02
Cerna, A.	Dist Consvst	Transfer to NHQ	GS-12	Salinas	12/01/02
Sternfels, J.	Soil Consvst	New Hire	GS-7	Petaluma FO	12/29/02



"You ask me for a motto. Here it is: SERVICE."

— Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)

## California

### CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

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